

Editorial

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This issue of *Peripeti* is dedicated to curating within and in relation to the field of performing arts. Over the past decade, the term has gained ground within a performing arts discourse (Georgina Guy 2016, Dena Davida, Marc Pronovost, Véronique Hudonvet and Jane Gabriels (eds.) 2018, Ferdman and Eckersall (eds.) 2021), where a number of publications and symposia have been devoted to the theme, whilst a host of educational programmes on curation in the performing arts have been launched, e.g. in Salzburg, Venice, Aarhus and the US. Yet it remains debated exactly what the term implies.

Deriving from the Latin *curatus*, to curate means “to care for”. Within a visual arts context – where the term is well established – the practice of curating has historically been ascribed to the museum inspector caring for the museum collection and its art objects. In this understanding, curating has been associated with a discreet figure, who from an allegedly neutral position collects, arranges and presents “the best of” art to a universalised audience. However, since the 1960s, this notion of the curator has gradually given way to an understanding of the curator as a mediator, communicator and facilitator of art commissions as well as a self-reflexive and critical creator of contexts in which different art works are brought into dialogue with one another (Gabriella Giannachi and Jonah Westerman 2018). The Swiss curator Harald Szeemann is iconic in this respect. Belonging to the first generation of international jet set curators in the 1960s and 70s, he compared the curator to a theatre director and the exhibition to a performance in which various art works were assembled according to an overall dramaturgy (Bismarck, 2010: 51). Whilst solidly entrenched in the art institutional critique of 1960s and 1970s and the contesting of the notion of the art space as a non-biased “free space”, the development towards the contemporary figure of the curator also has to do with the growth of international biennials in the late 20th century and the emergence of the group exhibition as an important format for presenting artistic work. Accordingly, nowadays, the curator’s task is no longer predominantly understood as caring for museum collections or finding and selecting the ‘best art’ and making it available to a homogenous audience. Instead, curators are compelled to create context, discourse and relationships between different audiences and the production and dissemination of artworks, sometimes to the extent that curators take on the role of authors or even artists. By the same token, curators are increasingly urged to explicitly situate themselves and to be transparent about the fact that their curating necessarily reflect their particular preferences, interests, and biases rather than some universal taste or “one size fits all” conception of art.

Over the past ten to fifteen years, the field of performing arts has gradually adapted the term of curation. The reasons for this are numerous. To name but a few, we may point to the increasing number of international performing arts festivals, biennials, and co-productions, indeed the “festivalising” trend (Hauptfleisch et al, 2007), that has come with the globalisation processes and the general internationalisation of the art world. Another reason is the rapprochement between the visual arts and the performing arts going on since the last part of the 20th century, including the museum world’s more recent embracing of live art practices, such as performance art and dance. Indeed, as theatre scholars Bertie Ferdman and Peter Eckersall put it in *Curating Dramaturgies*: “With the advent of the performative turn in museums and galleries, as well as the interest in visuality in contemporary performing arts practices, there is now considerable crossover between

curating and dramaturgy. Indeed, these two creative practices have become almost indivisible from one other” (Eckersall and Ferdman, 2021: 5). Eckersall and Ferdman explicitly relate curation to the emergence of “new dramaturgies” – dramaturge Marianne van Kerkhoven’s term for the rise of non-linear dramaturgies, also known as visual, hybrid or post-dramatic, in the late 20th century onwards. As per Eckersall and Ferdman, curation and new dramaturgies have in common the creation of multiple perspectives and affective dimensions within stage compositions that may bridge artistic, social and political contexts.

From another point of view, theatre scholar and dramaturge Katalin Trencsényi has argued that curating is integral to the practice of the dramaturge, when we understand this as the practice of selecting, programming, and presenting relevant plays, themes, actors, directors etc. within the framework of an institutional theatre structure. “It is striking”, she writes, “that this important curating function has been present from the origins of the profession; in fact, this seems to be the definitive role of an institution-based dramaturge [...] to take care of the organisation’s artistic profile, shape the institution’s narrative of creating a body of work that represents its artistic values and its philosophy, and support the organisation to locate itself within the community it serves” (Trencsényi, 2016: 35). Viewed this way, curating is part of a larger process of configuring a public and building a nation, where part of the job is to help establish and consolidate a certain canon of works that allegedly reflect the spirit and values of the nation. Indeed, it is hardly a coincidence that the first professional dramaturge Gotthold Ephraim Lessing served at a so-called National Theatre.

However, and this is also acknowledged by Trencsényi, just like the role of the visual art curator has changed since the 1960s, so has the role of the dramaturge. In addition to the reasons mentioned above, this has to do with the challenging of the divide between high and low culture happening from the 1960s onwards as well as the fact that over the past decades, potential audiences have become increasingly heterogeneous and also mobile. Theatres can no longer – if they ever could! – count on filling their seats by mounting classics from a curated canon. The decreasing status of established canons has only become ever more evident in the wake of the #BlackLiveMatters movement and the demands for a reclaiming of public space in recent years, which in turn have resulted in the dismantling of historical monuments and statues of people involved in the Atlantic Slave Trade. What is happening here is a battle over public space and over history – whose histories are being represented, and who is allowed to appear in public space?

This situation presents theatres, dramaturgs, curators and artists with a range of challenges and opportunities, because the knowledge, relationships and contexts that were implied to constitute art as part of a common public sphere can evidently no longer be taken for granted. Consequently, it is becoming increasingly problematic to base curatorial practice on utilitarian principles such as ‘the best for most’, since such a principle presupposes the idea of an educated citizen with ‘taste’ rooted in a ‘sensus communis’ (Kant). However, the idea of ‘taste’ here is of course entangled with racialised, gendered and classist biases, and neglects histories of discrimination against marginalised perspectives, and their cultural needs and tastes. Accordingly, we are currently witnessing how a growing number of theatres – to name but a few examples, we may point to the Maxim Gorki Theatre in Berlin, the KVS/Royal Flemish Theatre and Zinnema in Belgium or the National Theatre of Wales – seek to de-naturalise established cultural canons and repertoires by taking into account different demographic, economic and socio-political issues when assessing artistic quality, commissioning, framing and making artworks available to publics.

Together these curatorial practices invite us, with renewed vigor, to negotiate whose histories

and tastes artworks actually represent, and who gets to think, write and curate public spaces and cultural experiences for whom: What does it mean to ‘curate’ repertoires in theatre institutions, to ‘curate’ performing arts festivals or to ‘curate’ performance practices outside of purpose-built theatre buildings? Where do curatorial practices and dramaturgical practices align, overlap and/or differ? What does a curatorial lens offer for the field of theatre making and dramaturgy? What is the potential and what are the limits to putting into dialogue curatorial traditions within art museums and the field of theatre, dramaturgs and performing arts?

To try to think through these difficult, but necessary questions – questions that we warmly welcome – we have found dramaturg and curator Florian Malzacher’s concept of “performative curating” helpful. In the influential text “Empty Stages, Crowded Flats: Performative Curating Performing Arts” (translated for this issue by Matthias Bernbom Andersen), Malzacher seeks to qualify performative curating as a practice that should be distinguished from the broader and more diluted concept of “programming”. Taking inspiration from Chantal Mouffe’s notion of an *agonistic public sphere*, where different publics may meet and exchange or even fight over issues of common concern, Malzacher envisions *performative curating* as a practice of creating encounters and *situations*, not only between different artworks and performances, but also between audiences. In that sense, Malzacher argues, performative curating necessarily creates social and political situations. Indeed, he contends: “The idea of a curatorial, performative field that keeps things in flux and enables a playful (but serious) enacting of different positions is the perhaps slightly utopian vision of what curating in performing arts should aim for.” (Malzacher, 2018: xxi). The idea of curation as a playful, but serious enacting of different positions as well as the creation of social and political situations between different audiences is an apt description of many of the diverse curatorial practices explored in this issue.

Curating Performing Arts in Denmark

The first section of the issue provides an inquiry containing 17 contributions from actors in the performing arts field in Denmark – spanning from the National Stage to Det Frie Felts Festival. We posed three identical questions to all the contributors, regarding their style of curating; how the challenging of the notion of a homogeneous public space that we are experiencing these years has affected their thoughts on curating; and finally, which burning issues they envision will be decisive for curators and programmers to engage with over the next five to ten years. In our *curating* of this section, we have sought to shed light on a number of different approaches to curating as well as a number of different organisational structures and frames for curating in the Danish field of performing arts.

Needless to say, a section like this can never be fully representative, and it will always reflect the interests and blind spots of those who assembled it. In addition, not everybody we reached out to had the opportunity to respond to our invitation. Busy with navigating their theatres and festivals through a Covid 19-affected world some had to decline our invitation. Even so, we are excited about the many thought-provoking contributions we have received, and we invite you, dear reader, to think of this as an exciting, but necessarily incomplete state of the art discourse of curating in a Danish performing arts context. While it is beyond doubt that the term curation has gained ground, it is productive to think about how recent it actually is that this has happened. In 2007, when Ditte Maria Bjerg called herself “curator of contemporary theatre” at the short-lived theatre Camp X (the theatre was shut down after only two seasons), she was ridiculed by the Danish theatre critics and large parts of the theatre scene. Today, no one doubts the legitimacy of the term.

However, this should not occlude the fact that a lot of ground-breaking curatorial work has been going on in Denmark for decades, particularly within the field of international festivals – just think of the Fools Festivals, Copenhagen Cultural Capital of Europe, Aarhus Cultural Capital of Europe, Aarhus Festival, the International Living Theatre-biennale and the Genderhouse festival in Aarhus, the Waves festival in Vordingborg, the festive weeks of the Odin Theatre in Holstebro and the many festivals, programs and formats curated by Copenhagen International Theatre. Even if he may not refer to himself as a curator, Trevor Davies – director of Copenhagen International Theatre and leader of a number of the festivals mentioned above – has been and remains an indispensable and highly inspiring figure and driver of this development.

To return to the enquete, the contributions as well as our questions make clear that the “demand” for more diversity and responsibility for a broader representation in curatorial practices has increased. Many of the authors refer explicitly to movements such as #BlackLivesMatter and #Metoo, and they emphasise the need of performing arts institutions and organisations to mirror and represent the plurality and heterogeneity of the publics that reside in this country. However, when reading through the contributions, it becomes quite clear how much institutional affiliations and obligations define the ways in which curatorial practices are being framed, carried out and imagined. Whereas Morten Kirkskov at the Danish Royal Theatre and Trine Thomsen at Aarhus Theatre have an obligation to cater “to everyone”, as Thomsen terms it, and to provide a broad repertoire consisting of international and Danish plays, classics and new works, family theatre and music theatre etc., a number of the independent curators and smaller theatre leaders are more articulate about the need to – but arguably also more free to – engage in diversity work in their curatorial practices. A case in point would be Mungo Park that under the leadership of Anna Malzer has specialised in new plays “that may speak to a broader audience”. By the same token, Mungo’s ensemble is assembled of a set of diverse actors in terms of age and cultural background, since it is the wish of the theatre “to offer an overall expression that may reflect a modern world and in turn appeal to modern audiences.” (see Ann-Sofie Estrup Bertelsen in the inquiry).

Many of the contributors point out the relationship between curation and power and the importance the the curators acknowledging that he/she/they hold this power. This entails being mindful of the ways in which curatorial choices may reflect oblivion to structural biases and the ways in which uneven distribution of privileges and structural inequalities may have been internalised or even naturalised. In his contribution Nikolaj Mineka, leader of Teatret Møllen in Haderslev, reflects that when he started putting up photos in his office of actors, he was considering hiring, he first started realising that the majority of them were white, heterosexual males. Only when he was visually confronted with what he had grown accustomed to not seeing, did he begin to critically question not only his own casting choices, but the broader structures and value systems on which these choices were based.

Another important aspect of the curation and power complex is the notion of *access* that Gritt Uldall-Jessen, leader of Det Frie Felts Festival, brings up in her contribution. Who has access to what stages, whose voices are being heard, and whose practices are being reviewed and researched? How does the curator prevent that he/she/they exclude others to the same extent as the excluding structures they initially sought to fight? Uldall-Jessen emphasises that curators must be ready to give up their power and leave room for others if they sense that time is due. Danjel Andersson, leader of Dansehallerne, argues along similar lines, but in addition to building up platforms and then leaving them for others to build from, he promotes the concept of *guest curator* or *co-curation* as a strategy for redirecting access to certain institutions. The theatre Momentum in Odense is

perhaps one of the theatres in Denmark that has most radically pursued this strategy. Every year they invite a new curator or curator team to program the season, and with the aid of the permanent administrative staff and the production team at Momentum they manage to mount and support the repertoire envisioned by ever shifting curators. As Momentum's leader, Marianne Klint, puts it: "This way of having shifting leaders is also a means of securing diversity, thematically as well as aesthetically, in the repertoire". The idea of sharing or re-distributing the privilege one holds as a curator (or leader) is also reflected upon by independent curator Cecilie Ullerup Schmidt in connection with her project *Pass it on*. Launched within the framework of Tårnby Park Studio, Ullerup Schmidt invited three international works on transgenerational knowledges and legacies to be passed on to local performers in Tårnby: "How can the perspectives that the world (Denmark!) hears too little about get resources, space, attention?". At the same time, Ullerup Schmidt stresses the need to be wary of the danger of falling into the trap of "white saviourism" and of profiting from others' pain implied in this strategy.

From another angle, a number of the contributions warn that the current discourse on representation and diversity may end up policing and violating the relative autonomy and freedom that has been associated with art since the late 18th century. Whilst acknowledging – and also practicing – the need to be cognisant of one's own blind spots and of inviting others to co-curate in order to give room for more voices, Christian Lollike, leader of Sort/Hvid warns against "essentialist identity thinking" and the notion that one is only allowed to write or talk about issues that one has personal experience with. "It is no doubt necessary to articulate and discuss", he writes "how our different experiences and preconditions affect us on all sorts of levels, including the sphere of art. But there is also a danger that we will end up categorising each other in groups in a way that I think will prove to be limiting for us all. [...] in the long run, I fear that this [type of thinking, ed.] can petrify and freeze the mental agility of human beings". Be this so or not, there is no reason to believe that this important debate, which includes some very fundamental questions about structural inequalities and the legacies and current stand of Modern Enlightenment thinking, is about to end sometime soon.

Another issue that was addressed in a lot of the contributions was, of course, Covid-19, the lockdowns, and the migration of performing arts practices to online formats. While the many novel digital theatre formats that have emerged over the past two years have on the one hand challenged received notions of theatre as an artform defined by the bodily co-presence of actors and spectators, they have also – as many of the contributors to the enquete note – invited both theatre makers and audiences to re-think what *presence* may indeed mean within a performing arts context. The international, digital live performing arts festival *Re:locate* that was launched in spring 2021 by Karen Toftegaard provides an apt example of this. Featuring a number of Danish as well as international digital productions, it invited audiences to experience how *live* digital performing art may come across, and also, how performers and audience members may experience a distinct sense of community even if they do not share the same physical space. As noted by Nullo Facchini, leader of Cantabile 2 and the Waves festival, *AVATAR ME* by Fix & Foxy (which is reviewed in this issue) stood out in this respect. Setting up 1:1 digital, live encounters between audience members and actors around the world, it managed to create a sense of remote intimacy and a sharing of the experience of enduring a lengthy lockdown. Apart from such visionary digital theatre forms, podcasts, VR live experiences and apps for live-streaming events are but some of the formats that the authors of the enquete suggest that we will see more of in the theatre the coming years.

At the same time, a number of the contributions stress how Covid-19 has reminded us of

the uniqueness and the profound necessity of the *physical communities* which we find in theatre. The director of the Betty Nansen Theatre, Eva Præstiin, explicitly contrasts physical communities and collective co-creation with today's individualised and digitised performance culture. For her, however, it is important that the production frames and processes around collective co-creation are tailored to meet the demands of each singular production. According to Præstiin, this is a way of caring for both the processes of artistic creation and the working conditions endured by those taking part in a given production. Indeed, the notion of *care* understood not only thematically, but also infrastructurally as a way of securing sustainable work lives, is key in Præstiin's text. "Future curating and programming", she pleads, "calls for an increased awareness about the stand/profile of the organisation and for an increased care for questions related to representation, leadership, community, diversity, and the relation to audiences, employees, and collaborators." The notion of care also appears in a number of other contributions and in relation to the issue of sustainable work lives. This is worth noticing – and indeed promising – in a field that is notoriously known for its long hours, underpayment, star cult and exploitation of employees.

A final thread that we would like to point out is the interest in cross-disciplinary collaborations voiced and practiced by many of the contributors. Reading through the contributions it seems that collaborations with artists from other fields have become part and parcel of theatre today, and so have cross-institutional partnerships. The new initiative *Toaster* is a curated venue for art in the intersection of performing arts and visual art, hosted by Husets Teater and Den Fri and presents one such cross-institutional partnership. Another is the collaboration between Sort/Hvid and Kunsthall Aarhus as well as Sort/Hvid's new status as a hub for music theatre. Yet another example is the collaboration between Dansehallerne and Betty Nansen or Revolver at Østerbro Teater, where curator Rikke Hedeager has initiated a number of fruitful collaborations between visual artists, writers, musicians and actors, such as visual artist Jesper Just's *Cadavre Exquis* or *Brogger* with Jeanett Albeck (directed by Liv Helm). As per Rikke Hedeager these collaborations are to be welcomed and supported: "As for future curatorial practice, it is my hope that all the arts will coincide even more, and that all artistic processes will be designed to suit the specific work in question. This way we can together create generous, intuitive, loving, and groundbreaking performing art. Without anguish, but rife with vulnerability, willpower and hard work. I'm ready".

Content of this Issue

We open the issue with the enquete in order to establish an insight into current curatorial practices and perspectives within the field of performing arts in Denmark. The enquete is followed by the influential article by Florian Malzacher, "Empty Stages, Crowded Flats: Performative Curating Performing Arts", translated into Danish by Matthias Bernbom Andersen, which introduces a more theoretical discussion of curating and dramaturgy.

Drawing on Malzacher as a central reference, Anders Thru Djerslev, curator and Ph.D. candidate at Aarhus University, opens the research section with an article, which investigates the heuristic potentials and challenges in the crossover between curating and dramaturgy in the intermedial project *Museum for the Future*. *Museum for the Future* is a collaboration between the theatre Sort/Hvid and the contemporary art centre Kunsthall Aarhus, which Djerslev leads as project manager and curator/dramaturg. Djerslev argues that this kind of performative curating both emphasises and destabilises the institutional and ontological differences between the art forms.

Peter M. Boenisch, Professor in Dramaturgy at Aarhus University, analyses case studies of European theatres, which are radically transforming their role as public institutions by means of

curatorial practices. The article focuses on the Belgian theatres KVS/Royal Flemish Theatre and Zinnema in particular, and Boenisch points out how their institutional dramaturgy enables what he calls a *dialogical commonality*.

In contrast to this macro-dramaturgical perspective, Elvira Crois, Ph.D. candidate at the University of Brussels, offers a more micro-dramaturgical angle to the topic, by analysing how a performer curates participatory involvement within their performance. Crois describes the techniques and implicit values within the immersive theatre practices of Belgian performer and director Katrien Oosterlinck and Australian-Danish performer and director Sarah John. According to Crois, Oosterlinck and John are both enacting a *queer curatorship*, which invites and allows for what Crois calls *zones of disattunement* through which the audience participants can reveal themselves and meet each other in and through their differences.

Moving on from the perspectives of theatre studies towards contemporary art and curatorial perspectives, the curator and Ph.D. candidate at Copenhagen University Charlotte Sprogøe discusses experiments with theatricality and affective curating in the context of art exhibitions. Her case studies are the annual art scene event *Volcano Extravaganza* at the Italian island Stromboli north of Sicily and the exhibition project *Theatergarden Besitarium*, which has been developed in New York and different European cities, including Munich. Sprogøe discusses both cases in order to show how curatorial experiments apply, develop and widen theatrical tropes.

In the following article, Dr. Viviana Checchia, critic, curator and lecturer at the University of Gothenburg, develops a concept of *the circulatory* as a way of thinking and doing curating. Checchia's concept models the processual, situated in and engaging aspects of festival curating. Checchia's contribution can be read in dialogue with Malzacher's notion of performative curating, which serves as one of her key examples. A central point of her argument is the attempt to direct our thinking of curating towards an open, perpetual and recursive *site-responsiveness*.

Similar topics are found in Ph.D. candidate at the University of Agder Joachim Aagaard Friis' and curator Ida Schyum's article on how to curate an *anthropocene sensibility*. Their own curating of the art program of *Roskilde Festival* (2017) aimed to create reflection on human interconnectedness to eco-systems and other living beings. Their article discusses the ritual dramaturgy and the practical as well as conceptual challenges and potentials of this project.

After the peer reviewed research section, four articles reflect on practical experiences with curating. Aarhus University has since 2018 offered an international and interdisciplinary MA programme in curating, and the programme manager, Trine Friis Sørensen, curator and Ny Carlsberg Postdoctoral Fellows, talks with two of the first alumni about how they are developing their curating practices based on their recently completed education.

Dramaturg and Ph.D. candidate at University of Lund, Tanja Hylling Diers recounts how she was reminded of her own privileges and the political responsibility involved in any curatorial practice through her visit to the *Manchester International Festival* (2019) and the confrontations with this organisation's diversity work and policies.

Gitte Maria Bjerg, Head of Teaterhøgskolan in Malmø, identified as "curator" in 2007, while holding the role as artistic leader of the Danish theatre Camp X. Her use of the term raised controversy in the performing arts field, as the term only reached mainstream Danish theatre years later. In her contribution to this issue, Bjerg describes how her perception of the role as curator has developed since then – also based on her experiences with the project theatre *Global Stories* and her period as chair of the project funding programme for performing arts in the Danish Arts Foundation.

Cecilie Ullerup Schmidt, Assistant Professor at Copenhagen University, performance artist and curator, talks with two leaders from the management team of Gesnerallee Zürich, a scene for the national and international independent performing arts field in Switzerland. They discuss their efforts to break with patriarchal management traditions, precarious working conditions and issues of representation in the theatre institution.

In the theatre review section, Anika Marschall discusses Marie-Lydie Nokoudas staging of eight new theatre texts by Black playwrights at Teater Grob in the performance *Afro to the Future* (2021). Annelis Kuhlmann reviews Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė's, Vaiva Grainytė's and Lina Lapelytė's performance-opera installation *Sun & Sea (Marina)*, which visited Copenhagen Contemporary in 2021 after winning the prestigious Golden Lion award at the Venice Biennale (2019). Kathrine Winkelhorn analyses Fix&Foxy's *Avatar Me* (2021), a 45 min. live-streamed performance where the audience members are invited to share the live of a performer on another part of the planet.

Finally, we close this issue with three reviews of new and topical books: Janek Szatkowski discusses Peter Eckersall and Bertie Ferdman's *Curating Dramaturgies* (2021), and Erik Exe Christoffersen examines Juliane Rebentisch's recently translated *Samtidskunstens teorier* (2020) as well as Michael Eigtved's *På: Begivenhedskultur fra selfie til scenekunst* (2021).

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